

EXHIBIT NO. 7DATE: 1/22/09

BILL NO.

SB237

SB 237 Seatbelt use for me has always been a good idea. I understood the cost of human suffering and the cost of injury care, rehabilitation, and lost wages. But I wasn't personally affected, just professionally concerned. The death of my son in a tragic crash brought all that suffering to my home. Now it is deeply personal.

Evan was driving east on Highway 2 August 26, 2008, in his lane. Roy was driving west. Roy wasn't wearing his seatbelt. When Roy's truck was forced to the side of the road his wheels caught the edge of the pavement. Roy's truck jerked and Roy didn't. Roy's inertia carried him away from the controls for the truck. The truck crossed the center lane and plowed directly into Evan.

I imagine that Roy believed seatbelts were not important. Maybe Roy believed that it was his constitutional right to leave the seatbelt hanging from his door. But I believe that Roy may have been able to control the truck if he had been wearing his seatbelt. Roy died in the crash; he was ejected; his passenger, Ginger, was also ejected and died two days later. If they had been wearing their seatbelts they would probably be alive. And Evan would be alive too.

Roy and Ginger left behind two children, parents, siblings, and friends. Evan's widow lost the love of her life and her best friend; Evan's brother, parents, and friends all miss him terribly. The Montana Highway Patrol lost one of their best troopers. The human suffering is immeasurable. I cry every day.

But I was told that the legislators making this important decision need to hear the financial impact too. My son died performing his duties; he died while trying to stop an impaired driver. The state of Montana lost an experienced trooper. MHP invested significant resources to train Evan, they had to pay overtime to other officers to cover his empty schedule, they used crash investigation resources, they will have to train a new trooper, buy a new car, and compensate his widow. The state of Montana will also pay for the loss of Roy and Ginger: Ginger's medical care, years of support services for two orphans, and crash costs. Consider that none of these 3 hard working young people will pay another dime in taxes. I estimate that Montanans will lose over \$1,000,000. And this is just one crash. One unused seatbelt.

The truck which crushed Trooper David Graham a year before was also driven by an unrestrained driver. If she had been wearing her seatbelt David could be alive today too. Think about the suffering of his family. Add another \$1,000,000 to the cost for Montana's taxpayers.

Which is more important, the right of one person to act stupidly, or the rights of all people who drive Montana's highways to be safe? As a legislator you send a message to Montanans. A vote against this bill tells Montanans that seat belt use is optional, a personal choice. A vote for this bill sends the message that leaving your seatbelt off is a choice that endangers other lives on our highways.

Buckle up Flathead! Buckle up Montana! Buckle up legislators! The life you save may be your own, it may be your loved one, or it may be my remaining son.

Do the right thing—support this bill to save lives and save money.

Becky Sturdevant, 135 Rimrock Ct., Kalispell, MT 59901